

Ellington

2006 Plan of Conservation



Ellington Conservation Commission

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OVERVIEW

1

Plan of Conservation Overview

The Town of Ellington is the second fastest growing town in the 29 town Capital Region, and the sixth fastest growing in the State, according to 2003 data. Growth and development are changing Ellington from a predominately rural and agricultural town to a more suburban community.



Recognizing this current and potential growth, the Ellington Conservation Commission and the Ellington Planning Department, have developed a Plan of Conservation to help balance the pressures of development with the need for clean air, clean water and protected natural areas. It is intended to assist in the planning for growth and to insure that future generations can enjoy many of the features that make Ellington our choice of residence.

This plan incorporates the conservation recommendations of the Ellington Build-Out Analysis Ad-Hoc Subcommittee's final report and is consistent with Open Space Plans of surrounding towns, the Capital Region Council of Government's Regional Plan, and the State's Plan of Conservation and Development.

A major premise of the Plan is that conservation and development should complement rather than compete with one another.

The Plan of Conservation consists of the following sections:

- 1. An inventory of existing protected land.**
- 2. Town-wide conservation goals.**
- 3. Areas of Conservation Interest.**
- 4. Implementation strategies.**

PROTECTED LAND INVENTORY

2

Inventory of Current Protected Land and Recreational Assets

The total area of the Town of Ellington is approximately 23,000 acres. Approximately 13% of this area is currently protected. The State of Connecticut law (C.G.S. 23-8(b)) sets a goal of conserving 21% of Connecticut's land area and in 1998 the Governor established 2023 as the target date for meeting this goal. If Ellington is to meet this goal, an average of 108 additional acres must be protected every year. If Ellington is to retain its rural character, a much larger area must be protected.



The map in **Figure 1** shows the location of the most significant areas of protected open space in Ellington. An inventory is summarized in **Table 1**.

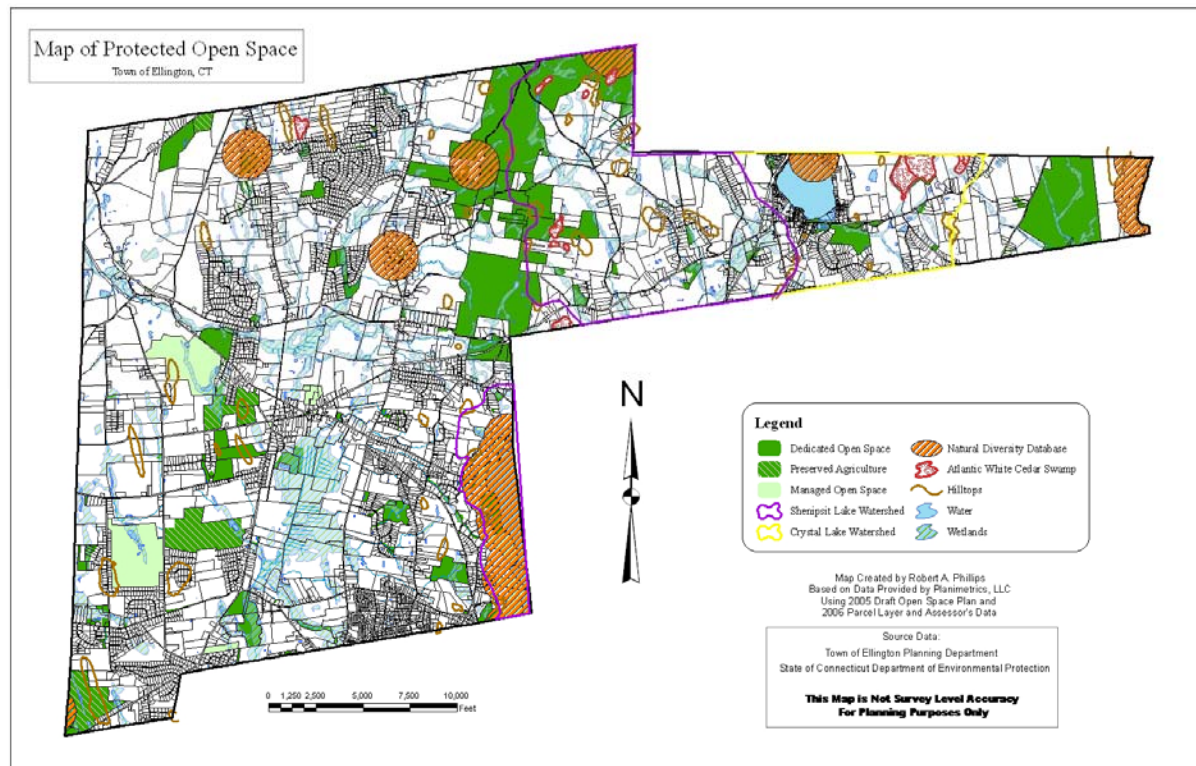


Figure 1 - Protected open space

Table 1 - Significant areas of open space and recreational assets in Ellington.

INVENTORY OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL ASSETS

(NOT INCLUDING GOLF COURSES AND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS)

DESCRIPTION	OWNER	AREA (ac.)
Santini Preservation Area	Town	63.78
Combination of Nutmeg Park Open Space and Santini Open Space		
Carriage Hill Open Space	Town	18.51
Crystal Ridge Estates Open Space	Town	52.4
Ellington Highlands Open Space	Town	29.5
Rising Acres II Open Space	Town	8.3
Batz Properties	Town	44.86
Kimball Forest	Town	47.36
Metcalf Nature Preserve	Town	15.63
Arbor Park	Town	3.3
Brookside Park	Town	44.6
Sandy Beach	Town	7.23
Crystal Lake Memorial Park	Town	0.24
Porter Road Highlands	Town	194.67
Other Town Unimproved Open Lands	Town	24.55
Properties Taken In Lieu of Taxes	Town	8.35
Railroad Right of Way	Town	5.82
Subtotal		569.1
Sunset Hill	Land Trust	14
Swann Farm	Land Trust	56.01
Joy Property	Land Trust	6.86
Bird Sanctuary	Audubon	6.67
Subtotal		83.54
Way Farm	PDR	90.85
Culbro Farm	PDR	171.09
Burke Farm	PDR	119
Pinney Farm	PDR	5
Pease Farm	PDR	20.79
Subtotal		406.73
Shenipsit State Forest	State	1205.41
Nye Holman State Forest	State	361.21
Bradway Reservoir	State	87.93
Boat Launch, Crystal Lake	State	4.69
Subtotal		1659.24
Crystal Lake		175.51
Shenipsit Lake		170.91
TOTAL =		3065.03

PRESERVATION GOALS

3

Town-wide Goals

Community input during the Build-Out Analysis revealed a strong emphasis on preserving Ellington's community character. The primary element of community character is Ellington's rural quality. The overriding goal of the Plan of Conservation is to help preserve the rural and historic character of Ellington as the town continues to grow. The following town-wide goals have been established to support this:



1) Preserve Our Working Farms

Ellington has been an agricultural community since the first settlers arrived, and that character is an important part of the Town's physical, economic, cultural, and social identity. Ellington is fortunate to have large areas of prime agricultural soils as shown on the map in Appendix A. Farmland preservation and the protection of working farms is a major goal of this Plan.

2) Protect Ellington's Natural Resources

In addition to prime agricultural soils, Ellington's natural resources include watercourses, watersheds, wetlands, broad vistas, extensive ridgelines, and unique geological features. The scenic ridgeline East of Route 83 is threatened with development because of the beautiful views. Our lakes, streams and wetlands are an important source of drinking water, recreation, and wildlife habitat. Expanded protection is needed to preserve and improve the water quality and to protect our natural resources.

3) Protect the Forests of Our Eastern Highlands

The Eastern Highlands contain extensive areas of woodlands. These picturesque forests contribute to improved air and water quality and contain important watersheds, wildlife corridors, ridgelines, and passive recreation trails for hiking, biking and walking. Preservation of this area is an important goal.

4) Preserve and Enhance Recreational Assets

For families of Ellington, life has always included an appreciation for recreation, whether hunting, fishing, hiking, biking or more organized activities such as youth sports. With its tremendous and unique natural assets, Ellington should preserve and enhance its recreational assets in order to accommodate the needs of its growing population.

5) Natural Area Links

An overall objective of this plan is to link existing parcels of open space. Linkage provides potential for wildlife corridors, opportunities for passive recreation, and can provide buffers through developed areas.



AREAS OF CONSERVATION INTEREST

The five (5) Areas of Conservation Interest

The analysis of the natural resources of our town has resulted in the identification of areas with exceptional value as open space. These regions have been designated as areas of conservation interest in order to give special emphasis to their preservation.

The conservation interest areas are intended to identify the regions of town with the highest priority for conservation, but inclusion in an interest area does not provide any special protection for a property. It is up to those implementing the plan to work toward the goal of conservation, property by property. It is our intent that all transactions to protect these properties will be voluntary on the part of the landowner.



Some properties, not located in the interest areas, will also have features that make them priority candidates for preservation and will be included in implementation plans for open space protection. The selection of priority properties will be based on a ranking of features that contribute to their value as open space.

In addition to the areas of conservation interest, other unique sections of town deserve special protection. The historic town center is an important part of the character of our town and should be preserved by careful planning, zoning and design review. The Great Marsh is a sensitive wetland that should be carefully controlled by the Inland Wetlands Agency.

Five areas of town, as shown in **Figure 2**, have been designated as areas of conservation interest:

- **Western Farm Belt**
- **Shenipsit Lake and Forest**
- **Crystal Lake Watershed**
- **Eastern Panhandle**
- **Hockanum River Linear Park**

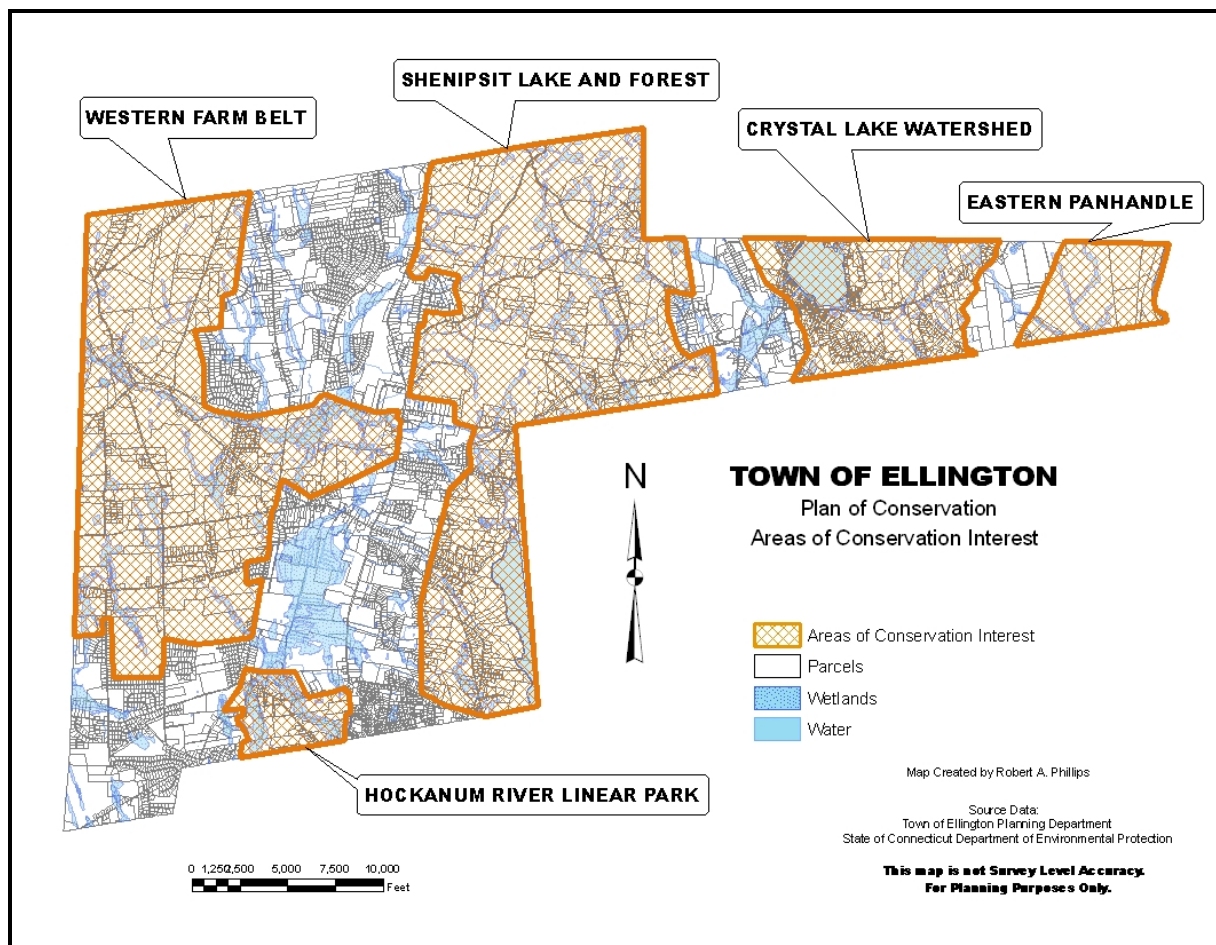


Figure 2 - Areas of Conservation Interest

Western Farm Belt

Ellington's working farms are an integral part of the rural character of our town. Farming is important to the town's physical, economic, cultural, and social identity. Farmland is under extensive pressure from developers since it generally consists of well drained gently rolling land that is relatively easy to subdivide and develop. Unless prompt measures are taken, our farmland will rapidly disappear. For these reasons the Western Farm Belt has been identified as an area of conservation interest.



If Ellington is to retain its character as a farming community, we need to provide an environment that encourages the continued operation of our working farms and we need to protect our prime agricultural soils from development. Farmland preservation can be achieved through the purchase of development rights (PDR) or the purchase of properties that are threatened with development. State and Federal programs are available to assist with the protection of agricultural land.

An environment favorable to farming is important so that families will continue to operate their farms. Reduced property taxes through the PA 490 program provide a significant benefit but should be supplemented by other special tax and economic incentives provided by the town. Farmland preservation loses its meaning if there is no one willing to farm the protected land.



Objectives:

- 1) Preserve farmland.
- 2) Encourage the continued operation of Ellington's working farms.

Strategies:

- 1) Encourage Ellington farm families to take advantage of the State's PDR program.
- 2) If farms are offered for sale, work to protect farms from development.
- 3) Support other initiatives to strengthen the farm economy and agribusinesses.

Shenipsit Lake Watershed and Forest

This is an area of special conservation interest because it includes the following features:

1) Watershed for the Shenipsit Lake public water supply. Charter's Brook, that drains a large part of this area, is a major source of recharge water for the Shenipsit Lake Reservoir.

2) The eastern highlands ridgeline. This scenic ridgeline runs parallel to and just east of Route 83. It can be seen from many parts of the Connecticut River valley. Southern portions have been scarred by development.

3) Extensive areas of upland forest. This large forest area includes more than 1,200 acres of Shenipsit State Forest and provides a major wildlife corridor that extends north through Somers and Stafford, through central Massachusetts and into northern New England.

4) Trails for passive recreation. Part of the State's Blue Dot Trail System is located in this area. This and many other connecting trails are used by hikers, bikers, snowmobiles, and hunters.



Objectives

1) Protect as much of the forest and Shenipsit watershed as possible.

2) Protect the eastern highlands ridgeline from development.

3) Limit development near Shenipsit Lake.



Strategies

1) Work with the DEP and Land Trust to acquire land adjacent to the Shenipsit State Forest.

2) Work with the Connecticut Water Company to protect the public water supply and increase recreational opportunities adjacent to Shenipsit Lake.

3) Advocate zoning changes and other measures to protect this area from inappropriate development.

Crystal Lake Watershed

The Crystal Lake watershed has been identified as an area of conservation interest because it is an important resource of recreation and because it contains sensitive environmental areas. Crystal Lake is used extensively by swimmers, boaters, fishermen, and ice skaters. Water quality must be carefully controlled if the lake is to remain attractive for recreation. In addition, the watershed includes areas identified on the DEP's Natural Diversity Data Base as containing species needing special protection. The white cedar swamp, approximately one mile east of the lake, provides a unique biological environment.



Objectives

- 1) Protect and improve the water quality of the lake.
- 2) Create and enhance opportunities for recreation.
- 3) Protect environmentally sensitive areas.

Strategies

- 1) Monitor and address water quality issues, including invasive species, sedimentation, untreated runoff and other concerns.
- 2) Educate the public concerning the impact and ultimate destination of uncontrolled non-point pollution. (pesticides, fertilizers, trash, oils, and other chemicals)
- 3) Work with the DEP and other regulatory agencies to promote safe and environmentally sound practices for boaters and other users.
- 4) Discourage in-water placement of structures, shoreline retaining walls and other features that detract from the natural functions of the lake.
- 5) Acquire key properties to preserve water quality, protect biological diversity and provide recreational opportunities.



Eastern Panhandle

This section of town has been selected as an area of conservation interest because it includes the Nye-Holman State Forest, the Willimantic River Greenway and biologically sensitive areas adjacent to the Willimantic River.



Towns along the Willimantic River corridor have formed the Willimantic River Alliance and through their efforts, this corridor has been adopted as an official state greenway. The Ellington Board of Selectmen adopted Willimantic River corridor protection as a conservation objective at their January 13, 2003 meeting and directed that the next revision of the Plan of Conservation and Development include this greenway as a component.

Objectives

- 1) Connect with the Willimantic River Greenway to the north and south.
- 2) Develop a trail system connecting with trails in Stafford and Tolland.
- 3) Expand open space adjacent to the Nye-Holman State Forest.



Strategies

- 1) Acquire key properties to extend the greenway through Ellington and expand the state park.
- 2) Develop the connecting trail system.

Hockanum River Linear Park

Towns along the Hockanum River have formed an alliance to develop a linear park along the river from its Shenipsit Lake source to its merger with the Connecticut River in East Hartford. The towns of Vernon, Manchester, and East Hartford have developed an extensive and popular trail system through this linear park. Because the Hockanum River flows through the southern part of Ellington, this section has been identified as an area of conservation interest.



Objectives

- 1) Establish the Ellington section of the Hockanum Linear Park to offer access to the river for boating, fishing and hiking.
- 2) Establish hiking trails to connect with Vernon's Hockanum River trail system.

Strategies

- 1) Acquire selected properties to permit public access to the river.
- 2) Support the Hockanum River Watershed Association in developing hiking trails adjacent to the river.



PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

5

Plan Implementation

Successful implementation of the Plan of Conservation will require financial resources, a dedicated organization, and adjustments to the zoning regulations.

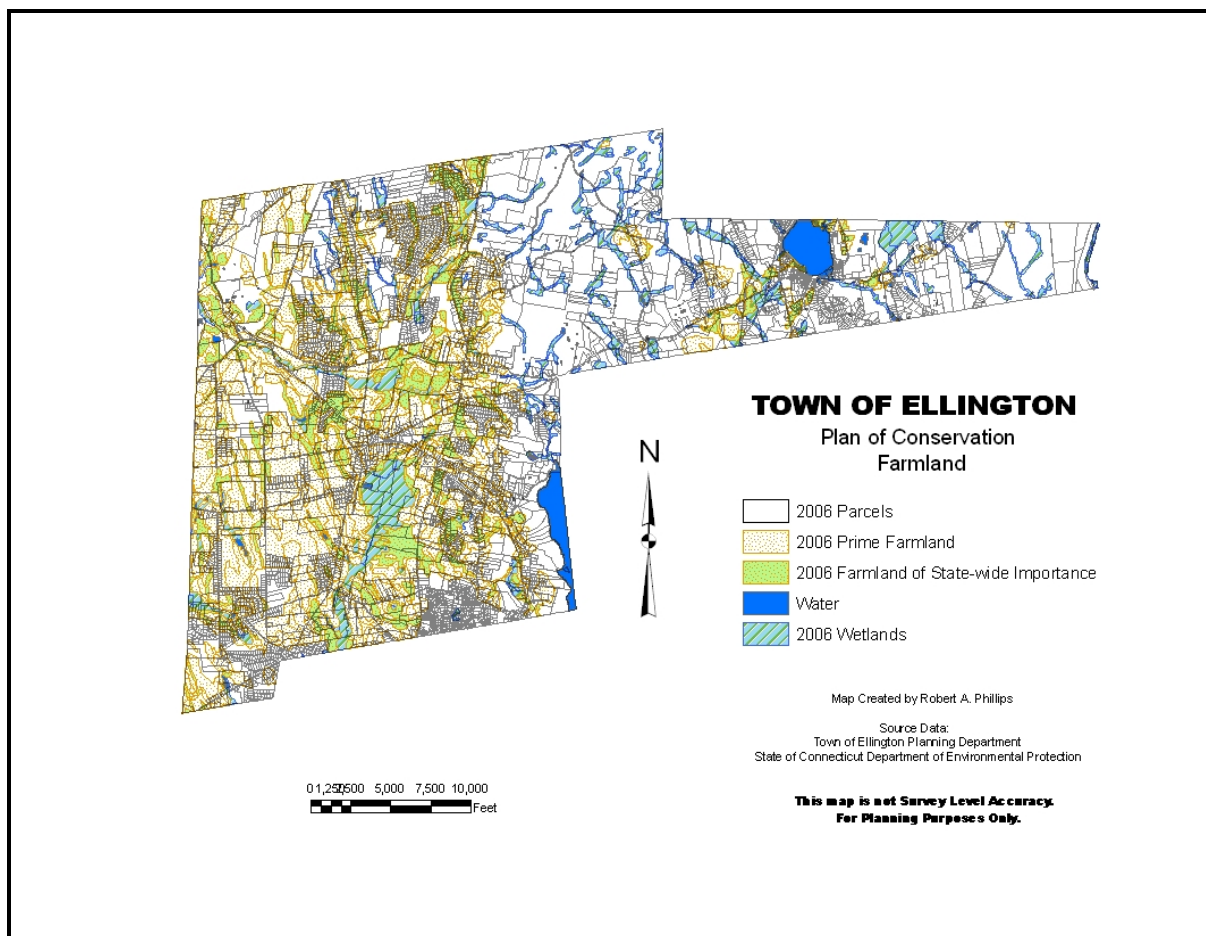


- A) Financial Resources- State and Federal funds may become available, but they must be matched and supplemented by town funds. This will require the support of the majority of the community and the cooperation and assistance of several town boards and commissions. A regular source of funding must be established if a meaningful conservation plan is to be implemented. Conservation funding should be included in the annual town budget or provided by periodic bonding. Investment in open space is cost effective because it reduces requirements for community services.
- B) Dedicated Organization- Successful implementation will require a dedicated organization with clearly defined authority and responsibility. This could be a committee of the Conservation Commission supplemented by town volunteers or it could be a separate Open Space Committee established by the town. Both types of organization are used by surrounding towns. The organization should be given the authority and responsibility for: 1) selecting properties to be preserved commensurate with guidelines established by the Conservation Commission, 2) negotiating with property owners, 3) securing approvals from town boards and commissions, 4) initiating requests for DEP grants, and 5) stewardship of town owned open space.
- C) Zoning Regulations- Changes should be made to zoning regulations to preserve our natural resources. Ridge line protection should be provided by zoning regulation. Larger minimum lot sizes should be required to reduce population density. Larger buffers along streams and rivers should be required to protect water quality and wildlife corridors. Cluster housing should be designed to provide buffers and greenways.

It is beneficial to the whole community if our natural resources are protected and our farmland and farms are preserved. Our quality of life is enhanced by the existence of natural areas and there are real economic reasons to protect the community's landscape. Natural resources lost to development will never be recovered.

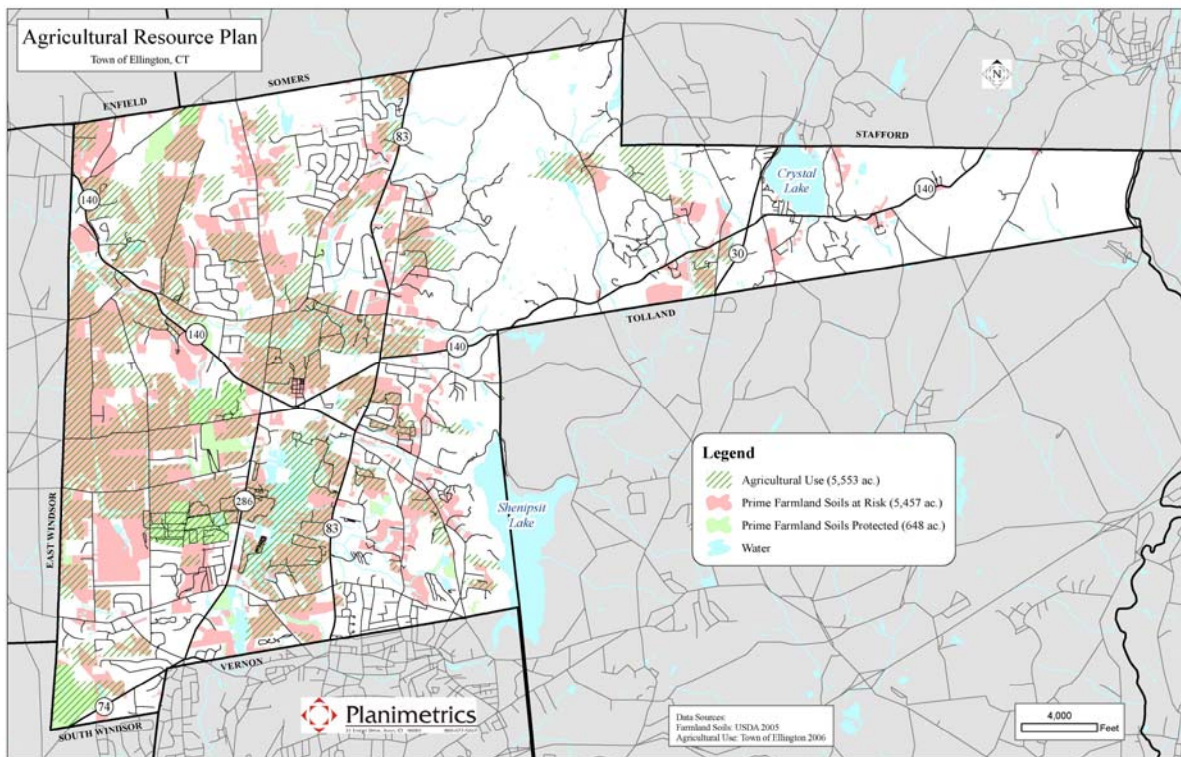
Appendix A

Prime Agricultural Soils and Soils of State-wide Importance



Appendix B

Agricultural Resources



Acknowledgements

This plan would not be possible without the input, guidance, and assistance from the following:

Members of the Ellington Conservation Commission:

Shawn Costello, Chairman
David Hurley, Vice Chairman
Jesse Amsel, member
Glenn W. Eberly, member
James Gage, member
Walter Moody, member

Ellington Town Staff:

Town Planner, Robert A. Phillips
Land Use Assistant, Reanna Goodreau

This plan was modified from a previous plan prepared by Planimetrics, LLC, and former Town Planner Matthew J. Davis.

Finally, the citizens of Ellington are commended for their wisdom and foresight in creating the Conservation Commission. It is the Commission's sincere hope that its efforts will help maintain and enhance Ellington's quality of life for present and future citizens.

